



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION ICE PALACE
**GROCERY OWNER PLEADS GUILTY
TO METH-RELATED CONSPIRACY**

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that the owner of a Barry County, Mo., grocery store pleaded guilty in federal court today to charges related to a conspiracy to distribute ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine.

Today's guilty plea is the result of Operation Ice Palace, a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

Norman R. Weaver, 44, of Seligman, Mo., pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge James C. England this afternoon to his role in the conspiracy. **Weaver** is the owner of Norm's Grocery Store in Seligman.

Weaver admitted that he had an agreement with co-defendants **Gabriel Delossantos**, 29, of Rogers, Ark., and **Benjamin Paine**, 28, of Purdy, Mo., to distribute pseudoephedrine in order to have the pseudoephedrine be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Weaver** admitted that he sold 2,568 pills of 30-milligram dosage pseudoephedrine to **Delossantos** and **Paine** on Oct. 16, 2002, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine.

Paine and **Delossantos** have each pleaded guilty to their role in the conspiracy. **Paine** pleaded guilty on April 18, 2005; **Delossantos** pleaded guilty on April 14, 2005.

Under federal statutes, **Weaver** could be subject to a sentence of up to 20 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.

Weaver is the seventh co-defendant to plead guilty to charges contained in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury in Springfield on March 31, 2004, and later replaced by superseding indictments. Among those co-defendants:

* **Troy K. Kelly**, 33, of Gerard, Kan., pleaded guilty on April 22, 2005. **Kelly** is a sales agent for Handi-Rak, a convenience store supply company located in Springfield, Mo.

* **Gerri Deering**, 47, of Shell Knob, Mo., pleaded guilty on April 18, 2005, to her role in the conspiracy. **Deering** admitted that, while employed at Rapid Roberts in Shell Knob, Mo., she sold a total of 936 pseudoephedrine pills of 30- and 60-milligram dosage to an undercover officer with the Missouri State Highway patrol in July and August of 2002.

* **Tracy J. VanBibber**, 39, of Camdenton, Mo., pleaded guilty on April 15, 2005, to distributing pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **VanBibber** was an employee of County Corner Convenience Store in Sunrise Beach, Mo., in August 2002, when she sold a total of 360 pseudoephedrine pills to an undercover officer with the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

* **Charles Laffoon**, 64, of Harrison, Ark., was sentenced on May 4, 2005, to three years of probation. On June 4, 2004, **Laffoon** pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy to distribute pseudoephedrine, knowing that it would be used to manufacture methamphetamine. **Laffoon** was a sales agent for Handi-Rak, a convenience store supply company located in Springfield, Mo., from January 2001 until November 2003.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. Operation Ice Palace was investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Greene County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Lawrence County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Ozark County, Mo., Sheriff's Department, the Arkansas State Police, and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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